



Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services



Department of Social & Health Services and Washington State Patrol Partnership

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DSHS and WSP Partnership Screens Potential Handgun Owners

Beginning today, Washington has taken a critical step toward ensuring people found by the courts to be seriously mentally ill can't obtain handguns.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), with the assistance of the Washington State Patrol (WSP), electronically has begun providing the FBI with the names of people disqualified by the courts from having handguns. The FBI will incorporate the information in its National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS).

Gun shop owners and law enforcement officials use NICS to screen people purchasing firearms. The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993 created the NICS index to identify people whose possession of a firearm would violate federal law.

The NICS Index will not identify people found to be mentally ill whose rights to firearms have been revoked. Rather, the computer response will be a "state disqualified" when a query is made about the person. This ensures the privacy of the individual while allowing law enforcement officers across the country to have the most accurate information available when reviewing a firearm ownership application. The disqualifier is removed from the person's NICS file if a court restores his or her right to have a firearm.

To date, no other state has contributed disqualifying mental health information through a cooperative effort by mental health and law enforcement officials.

Stated Eugene Donaldson, Section Chief of the NICS Section, "In today's mobile society, the NICS Index is a valuable tool in providing immediate accessibility to federally prohibitive records previously held only on a state level. The contribution of these records to a national database by the Washington State Patrol and the Washington DSHS provides vital information to all states, including the FBI NICS Section, when performing a NICS background check. Without this information being readily available, prohibited persons may be successful in their attempt to possess a firearm."

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